

# **WHAT BUCHENWALD REALLY MEANS**

by

**VICTOR GOLLANCZ**

[ 3d. net ]

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

ENRIETTA STREET, W.C.2

23355

TO THE MARTYRS  
OF ALL RACES, NATIONALITIES AND CREEDS  
WHO HAVE DIED IN THE FIGHT  
AGAINST FASCISM

"Ehrenburg assures his readers that all Germans are the same, and that they will all be held responsible in equal measure for the Hitlerites' crimes. He states: 'There is no Germany. There is only a huge gang who are scattering and fleeing, now that the time has come to answer for their deeds.'

"There is no difficulty about showing that these assurances of Ehrenburg's do not correspond with facts. . . .

"... The Soviet people never did identify the German population with the criminal Fascist clique who are ruling Germany. Stalin said: *"It would be ludicrous to identify Hitler's clique with the German people, with the German State. The experience of history shows that Hitlers come and go, but the German people and the German State remain."*

—Georgi Alexandrov, *Pravda*, April 14th, 1945.

"For they appeal from tyranny to God."—BYRON.

"We have no information whatever to suggest that they [prisoner of war camps] are in any way to be compared with the appalling conditions prevailing in the concentration camps for German political prisoners such as Buchenwald."—Mr. A. Henderson, Financial Secretary to the War Office, in a written reply to a question in the House of Commons, April 27th, 1945; my italics.

9561 FES 13.11.73

THE WHOLE GERMAN PEOPLE SHOULD  
BE WIPED OUT FOR THIS!

DON'T FORGET SOME OF US ARE GERMANS, FRIEND



By permission of the "Evening Standard."

## WHAT BUCHENWALD REALLY MEANS

THIS PAMPHLET is not, in the main, about the Buchenwald horror, but about the reaction to it.

What needs to be said about the horror itself, the horror not only of Buchenwald but of camp after camp throughout the length and breadth of Germany? Only this. It has been going on, this sin against humanity—this sin so great that even to speak of it, even to think of it, makes one ashamed to be a man—it has been going on ever since Hitler came to power in the early weeks of 1933. There has never been the slightest excuse for anyone to plead ignorance of it. In that very first year I published *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror*, in which the first stages of the terror were exposed with a wealth of documentary and photographic evidence which allowed of no denial. Or should have allowed. For, quite apart from the indifference of the overwhelming majority of "ordinary" men and women, such an organ of Conservative and "Big Business" opinion as the "Morning Post"—since incorporated in "The Daily Telegraph"—was able to begin its review of the book with the words:

"A blood-curdling compendium of 'atrocities' alleged to have been committed under the Nazi régime" (the inverted commas are the "Morning Post's"), and to end it like this:

"Anything that is not corroborated up to the hilt from other sources will naturally be suspect, and the sane reader will be predisposed to sympathise rather with Herr Hitler than with his accusers."

Shortly afterwards I published *The Yellow Spot*, which detailed the cruelties, tortures and indignities committed, more specifically, against the Jews: and this was the beginning of a long series of books continued not merely up to the outbreak of the war but beyond it, the last of them being *Let My People Go*, in which I attempted, by describing what was happening in Poland, to arouse such a public opinion as would compel certain practical measures to be taken for the rescue of even a small percentage of these victims before it was too late. The effort failed: we know now that something like four million Jews—a quarter of the whole Jewish population of the world—have been massacred amid every circumstance of terror and shame. If you want to know what it was like, read this extract from a letter of a Polish-Jewish child:

"I must now say good-bye. To-morrow mother goes to the gas chamber, and I shall be thrown down a well."

I mention things I have published and written myself because, at such a moment as this, to recall that one has at least done something helps a little to assuage the pain of having done so little. But my own effort was, of course, a very small part of the whole. There were many other books: there were well documented pamphlets, especially those issued by the Labour and Communist Parties:

there was "The Manchester Guardian," "The Daily Herald," "The Daily Worker," "The News Chronicle," and "The New Statesman": and even the Right Wing Press from time to time carried "headline" stories of fresh atrocities, for, whatever might be the editorial policy of these papers, the stories were "news"—and that, among journalists, is something sacred.

No, there was never the smallest excuse for pleading ignorance. And now ask yourself, reader—what did *you* do about it? Nothing? Why? Because you didn't care enough? Because it was none of your business? Because you couldn't bear to think about it, and so averted your eyes? Or because—because—"well, what on earth *could* I, an ordinary, powerless individual, do anyhow?"

They are poor answers, all those. They say little for your citizenship, for your humanity, for your active belief in the brotherhood of man. But at any rate remember them when we come, later on, to consider the collective responsibility of the whole German people for these outrages.

That is all I want to say about the horror itself. Except perhaps this. You can do something *now*. Instead of satisfying yourself with feelings of hatred and indignation against the torturers, you can vow to give succour—not only now, when your emotions are aroused, but in all the years to come—to those of the tortured who still live, but oh! how precariously, and in what agony of mind and body! You can vow to give succour to them. Whatever may be their race, religion or nationality. *Even if they are Germans.*

That brings me to the heart of what I want to say.

An influential section of the Press, and many writers and public men, are using these revelations—which are no revelations at all to those who have lived in an agonised consciousness of them, day after day, for twelve long years—as proof at last of the utter wickedness of all Germans, and of the "collective guilt" of the whole German people. And what is so shameful about this campaign is that, however ignorant the general public may be, these writers know very well that what is really proved beyond any possibility of doubt is the exact opposite.

For who *are* these victims? Who are these men and women whose eyes stare at you from outraged bodies in the morning papers, and whose ashes accuse the whole world? Who are they who have made up the doomed population, not only of Buchenwald, not only of most of the other concentration camps of which Buchenwald is merely a sample, and maybe not the worst, but also of the Gestapo prisons and torture chambers, as at Cologne, which are coming to light all over Germany? I do not speak of the extermination camps in Poland, such as that at Auschwitz (which is merely the German name for Oswiecim), where for three years now millions of Jews have been slaughtered, with very little effort made, in spite of all our urgings, to save even some small proportion of them: I speak of the camps in the "Greater Germany" of 1939—Buchenwald, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and the rest. Who are, who have been, their inhabitants?

Their present population—and it is a measure of the shame that has come upon humanity that such a word can be used in such a connection—is a mixed one. You could find in them, dead or dying, foreign slaves, Jews from all over Europe, resistance workers from the conquered countries, Russians, hostages, a very few British and American prisoners of war—and Germans: German Communists, Socialists, Liberals, Christians and others who have dared in any way to oppose the régime, or have been considered “dangerous” to it. Ed Murrow talked in Buchenwald with a German Communist who had been there *ten years*: in another camp there was a German Professor who had made some slighting reference to Hitler. How many of these German oppositionists, these “innocent Germans,” are now in the camps and prisons it is impossible to say: but the “Times” reports that in Buchenwald alone there were, at the time that it was overrun, three thousand of them.

But consider, not merely the present moment, but the whole period of 1933 to 1945. Many of the vilest of these camps were established in the first year of the régime: nearly all of them before the war. *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror* shows—and showed early in 1933, when it was published—that even then there were no less than 45 concentration camps, great or small, containing between 35,000 and 40,000 German anti-Fascists: and I believe now that that was a serious underestimate. And now reflect on this: that from 1933 to 1939 there were no foreign slaves, no resistance workers, no prisoners of war, and that *all* the inmates were either “Aryan” or “non-Aryan” Germans.

Moreover, the overwhelming majority, in this period taken as a whole, were political oppositionists: not many Jews, simply as Jews, were in these camps before the war (though many may have been there for their political opinions), except for a short period after November, 1938. The persecution of the Jews took a different form: they were beaten up, deprived of civil rights, prevented from earning a living, and outrageously insulted. And then after the outbreak of the war they were deported East, to join their brethren in the gas chambers and incinerators of Poland.

Over the whole period of 1933 to 1945 how many German oppositionists, how many “innocent Germans,” have lived and died in Buchenwald and Dachau and Sachsenhausen and all the rest? No one can know: but it is possible to get at least some vague idea. First, consider the “turnover” in these camps—how men and women went there, died, and were replaced by others. Secondly, remember that there were twenty thousand survivors at Buchenwald when the camp was overrun, and that the records showed a death rate of five or six thousand a month. Finally, read this article from the *Zürich Weltwoche* of 9th March, 1945: and I will only say that there are the strongest possible grounds for believing it to be authentic and reliable.

“Thus we get a comprehensive picture of a terrorist nursery (Terrorplantage) exploited down to the last detail for the ends of the war economy or for self-sufficiency. It will be understood that it is difficult to get the precise figures of the total number of prisoners

in all the actual German concentration camps—that is, excluding those camps in occupied territories and the specialised annihilation camps. But in any case the following average figures are hardly disputed:

Buchenwald, near Weimar .....	40,000
Sachsenhausen, near Oranienburg .....	25,000
Dachau, near Munich .....	11,000
Neuengamme, near Hamburg .....	6,000
Gross-Rosen, in Silesia .....	4,000
Fallersleben, near Brunswick .....	4,000
Danzig-Stuthoff .....	4,000
Flossenbürg, Upper Palatinate .....	3,000
Mauthausen on the Danube .....	3,000

"To these must be added certain smaller camps and the big ones which come under the *Kommandantur Papenburg* and are known by the names of Esterwegen, Boergermoos, Neu-Sustrum and Aschendorf, though exact figures for them are not available.

"Why these figures? Because they reflect, besides all the various economic and military aspects, the true face of these concentration camps as well. Dachau and the rest of the most important camps were set up immediately after Hitler's seizure of power in the spring of 1933. The average numbers of inmates given were, until the annexation of Austria and the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia, made up exclusively of Reich German opponents of the régime, a fact which at all events allows certain conclusions to be drawn about the existence of an active opposition to the régime, especially when the sentences passed by the People's Courts are also taken into account. According to information given by the prison authorities to a priest, in Berlin alone, at the penal institution of Plötzensee, in May, 1942, between 20 and 25 persons were executed daily, and in May, 1943, between 50 and 55 daily—almost all of them in accordance with sentences passed by the People's Court for activities hostile to the State. Of the persons who entered the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in November, 1938, numbering almost 22,000, more than 5,000 had died by March, 1939, of cold and debility. *All these were Reich Germans.* . . .

"Thus the concentration camps become a symbol of the actual German opposition; Dachau is a symbol in the mind of the world, but it is also a symbol in the minds of the German enemies of Hitler. It was there that the poet Ernst Wiechert suffered and that the Communist and former Lieutenant in the *Reichswehr*, Scheringer, was murdered: it was there that the Bavarian democratic politicians met their end and also Dean Zillikens of Mayen in the Eifel, who failed to greet Göring while on a walk—German victims from the Right as well as from the Left."

What is the writer saying? That in the nine camps mentioned (apart from all other camps, big or small, and the innumerable Gestapo prisons and "Houses") there were *at any given moment* from 1933 to 1939, on an average, 100,000 Germans: and that of

the 22,000 in Sachsenhausen in November, 1938, between twenty and twenty-five per cent. were dead four months later—to be replaced by others. These two figures, taken together, will give you some idea of the total number of Germans who, since 1933, have gone to their death in Hitler's camps—or, more unhappily, have, year after year, somehow managed to live.

And remember also that almost every one of these men and women was a hero. For the Jews, it is true, there was no possibility of salvation: they were doomed, beyond any hope of escape, by reason of their "blood." But all the others might, at any time, have gained release from unspeakable tortures by recanting. We have the record of one or two who did: but most of them preferred to suffer, and, at long last, to die.

And yet the very last impression that the casual reader gets, or, I am afraid, is intended to get from that section of the Press to which I have referred, is that the population of these camps has been largely a German population: and in only one or two papers have I seen the plain fact stated that here is, or has been, the German opposition: here is, or has been, that "other Germany," the existence of which has been denied by the stupid and the malicious. Or rather, a *part* of the German opposition: to that I shall return.

Mr. Beverley Baxter, Member of Parliament, said a few months ago that there might be some "good Germans"—say five or six of them. Does this enthusiastic supporter of Mr. Chamberlain, this gentleman who even to-day defends the policy of Munich—does he still think that figure a just one? Or, as he opens his "Daily Express" at the breakfast table and sees that pile of bones and ashes, does he wonder, with perhaps a touch of shame, whether he was mistaken? And if so, will he confess it?

I say, then, that the evidence of these camps, far from proving that all Germans are vile and that the whole German people is "collectively guilty," proves the opposite. But that is only half the story. It is only half the story because, apart altogether from these hundreds of thousands who have gone to their death, the very existence of this hellish apparatus—these concentration camps, torture chambers, Gestapo prisons, spies, block wardens and the rest with which Germany has been honeycombed—indicates the presence of an opposition, actual and potential, far more extensive than can be measured by the mere number of tortured victims. People go on repeating, as if they were drugged, "The whole German people has been solidly behind Hitler": and never stop to wonder why, if that is so, such an instrument of internal oppression, street by street and house by house, was necessary.

Is there any direct evidence, other than that of the concentration camps, for the existence of this opposition? Well, I have already quoted, from the *Weltwoche* article, some figures of daily executions in one penal institution alone. Again, according to official statistics, there were already in April, 1939, 32,000 Germans in the penal battalions of the OT, most of them having gone there direct from the concentration camps. These penal battalions of the OT

and *Wehrmacht* were to be employed on the most dangerous and disgusting tasks: and into them the *German* enemies of Hitler were drafted.

Nor do we have to rely only on such facts as these. Some of our own war correspondents are using their eyes and their tongues: but what they write is drowned in the ocean of "collective guilt" propaganda. In the "News Chronicle," for instance, of Saturday, April 21st, there is a "splash" article on the front page by Mr. Henry Standish, War Correspondent, with the headline "The Living Dead of Belsen." In the course of it he says: "For me, the whole lesson of this camp . . . is first the culpability of Nazi Germany *which is all Germany* . . ." [my italics]. In column four, on the same page, is a smaller article, with the less conspicuous headline "There is the other kind of German," by S. L. Solon, War Correspondent. Here it is in full:

Duesseldorf, Friday.

"Here in the heart of industrial Germany where Left-Wing parties always had great followings, there are many Germans who really regard themselves as friends of the Allies.

"Lt. Jacques de Gannernaecker, a French prisoner of war whose home is in Paris and who lived in the area, told me:

"There was considerable anti-Nazi sentiment in the Ruhr among the workers. They have been opposed to the war I think since the start, and many of them have been cruelly punished by the Nazi for their views."

"I came across concrete instances of how some German workers helped the victims of the Nazis.

"One working-class family in a Duesseldorf suburb has for two years hidden two Jews, feeding them out of their own rations, to save them from the Nazis.

"A Polish slave worker hunted by the Gestapo for his underground activity was sheltered by a German girl who helped him in his work."

In the same paper on the same day Olle Ollen, for nearly three years Berlin correspondent of the Stockholm paper "Morgontidningen," and the last Swedish-born newspaperman to leave the Nazi capital, writes as follows:

"There is bitter hatred stored in the hearts of a great many Germans, and it will be a terrible day when it is turned loose and runs across Germany like wildfire.

"The workers in Moabit and Neukoelln will act when that day comes. . . .

"How many families are there in Germany who have relatives in concentration camps? How many have received the laconic message: 'Your husband, son, brother, has died. Inform where belongings should be sent.' . . .

"There is one category of political prisoners called 'Nacht und nebel'—"Night and mist." If inquiries are made at the camp in which they are supposed to have been sent, nobody knows anything about them.

"Their names have never been on any prisoner lists. They

were gathered in 'annihilation camps' in which one week's stay means dysentery and internal sickness. On my way out of Berlin I saw some of these prisoners being taken back to the city when the Allied advance began. They had been marching several days.

"Clad only in blue and white striped 'prisoners' pyjamas and wearing wooden clogs, they could scarcely move and drag themselves an inch at the time.

"I heard one of them shout: 'Salute Berlin. We'll never see it again.'"

Finally, here is a cutting from the "Daily Herald" of Monday, April 23rd:

"The first active underground anti-Nazi movement in Germany was found in Leipzig.

"An American counter-espionage agent told a war correspondent that the organisation had hidden 41 British prisoners of war for five days, giving them three hot meals a day, and afterwards smuggled them through the German lines to the Americans, then 12 miles away.

"Four of the prisoners were airborne troops captured at Arnheim.

"Another resistance movement, said to be on a national basis, gave the Americans a list of Gestapo leaders in Leipzig."

\* \* \*

If I wrote no more I should already have proved my point, beyond any possibility of refutation. All Germans are *not* guilty: on the contrary, hundreds of thousands of them have suffered and died for our own great cause of freedom and humanity: and I say that it is the meanest of sins to turn the very proof of their sufferings into a proof of their guilt, for that is what you do when, faced with the evidence of the concentration camps, you say "Every German is guilty."

But I intend to write a good deal more; for I know, of course, exactly what the answer to all this will be. "Take all the people who are in, or have passed through, all the concentration camps, or have been shot by order of all the People's Courts: add to them all of the type to whom Solon refers: and still you have a small minority of the German people. The rest, if they have not actively welcomed these things, have at least acquiesced. *They* are therefore guilty." The Press is indeed already making this reply, so to say, in advance. The Weimar episode is typical. The people of neighbouring Weimar, it will be remembered, were marched to Buchenwald to "see for themselves." Some cried: some fainted: some protested that they knew nothing of what had been going on. The average Press comment is, in effect, that if they did not know it was because they "preferred not to know," because they "averted their faces": "anyhow, they did nothing about it, and so are guilty."

Notice that the ground has already shifted, without anybody noticing it. It is no longer *all* the Germans who are guilty: it is now the great majority of Germans. Other, I suppose, than the children—up to what age? For anyone who says that a child of

one, or five, or ten, is "guilty" for what goes on around him is a caricature, not only of a Christian but of a man.

I do not know, nor can these writers know, what have been the proportions of active Nazis, of active oppositionists, and of "acquiescers." However, let that go: say that the oppositionists have been a very small minority, and the acquiescers a very large majority: and what does the charge amount to? Simply to this: that a very small minority of Germans were heroes, and a very large majority were not.

Let us ask ourselves just what was *possible* once the terror, of which we now have the last awful proofs, was clamped down, as it was already clamped down in 1933? I do not believe—I never believed, as I made clear during all those years—that the régime *could* be overthrown so long as it was unopposed by the free peoples of the world: still less do I believe, or ever did believe, that it could be overthrown so long as many of these free peoples, or their Governments, actively supported it, as they did support it to their everlasting shame. People forget what an unspeakably efficient instrument of oppression is a modern dictatorship, with its machine-guns, its airplanes, its tortures, and its spies, to say nothing of its propaganda, so bemusing to our still childish humanity. Even a few hundred thousand men, organised by such a tyranny, can hold down, without any possibility of effective reply, a people a hundred times as great or more. All the armies of Europe could not withstand the *Wehrmacht* until Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States had slowly mobilised their giant strength: was it conceivable that the German people could withstand the S.S. and the Gestapo?

Nevertheless many—many absolutely if not relatively—tried, as we have already seen: they tried, because there are some men and women whose sense of civic duty and human dignity is so great that even a hopeless protest against intolerable evil, and at whatever cost, is held preferable by them, and rightly held preferable, to surrender. More *should* have tried; to that I shall presently return. But for the moment:

Put yourself, if you can, in the average German's place: imagine yourself a German, let us say, in 1938. You have heard ghastly rumours of what goes on in the prisons and concentration camps: every now and again you hear it whispered that a mother has had a note from the Gestapo asking to what address the clothes of her son, who has disappeared, are to be sent. There is an all-pervading atmosphere of mystery and terror: but there is no definite information, for there is freedom neither of the Press nor of discussion, nor even of private speech. You know that there is a spy in every block, perhaps in your very room: you know that if you say a word of criticism, or even ask an indiscreet question, a horrible fate, which you dare not even imagine, may befall you, *and, if you are a parent, your children also*. What can you do about it? You can try to find out the whole truth about the concentration camps, with the knowledge that by the mere fact of doing so you are in all probability signing your torture-warrant:

and if you nevertheless survive, you may join an underground group, with the certainty that then nothing but a miracle can save you. *Will* you do this? If you are a hero, yes; if not, no. Are you *sure* you are a hero? If you have any doubt about it, read the Gospel according to St. John, Chapter 8, verse 7, and do not cast the first stone.

I have tried to face this matter honestly in my own case. I have five daughters, whose ages run from sixteen to twenty-five. If I had been a German of 1938, and if my daughters' ages had run, say, from two to twelve, would I have run the risk—the risk that was almost a certainty—that they would become the things that sicken us when we see them pictured in the newspapers? Would my wife? I just cannot answer, for I do not know: I can only pray God that I may never have to make the choice. And I am a highly “political” person, whose life is actively motivated by a loathing of everything for which fascism stands: the majority of people are not.

And now drop the fiction that you are a German man or woman in the year 1938, and remember what you actually were in that year—an Englishman or Englishwoman. Did you in fact—as I asked at the beginning of this pamphlet—“do something about it”? No? Why not? “It was no concern of mine: it was happening in *Germany*.” This is apparently how Mr. Eden felt; for he said in a broadcast on January 5th, 1942, “The trouble with Hitler was not that he was a Nazi at home. The trouble with him was that he would not stay at home.” Well, I am a Jew, and believe that we are all children of one Father: you are, perhaps, a Christian, and believe that we are all brothers one of another. Ought it to make one split hair's difference to you or to me whether the man, woman, or child who was enduring that shameful torture was a German or an Englishman, a Gentile or a Jew? “I couldn't bear to think of it, so I averted my eyes.” It is just for this that the Press is attacking the Germans. “What on earth *could* I, an ordinary, powerless individual, do about it, anyhow?” You are the citizen of a democracy: you are supposed to control your Government. In the final analysis, no democratic Government *dare* fly in the face of public opinion, if it is sufficiently strong and sufficiently vocal. But you “preferred” to allow your Government, year after year, to *pursue a policy which actively consolidated Hitler's power*. I do not wish to introduce party polemics into this pamphlet. But if anyone doubts the truth of the words italicised, and will write to me at the address on the cover, I will give him the titles of books and pamphlets in which the charge is proved beyond any possibility of refutation.

Your case is morally worse than that of the “ordinary” Germans—and by “ordinary” I mean that great majority in every country, and not merely in Germany, who are not heroes, who “look after their own concerns” and “don't interfere in politics.” For you knew exactly what was happening in the concentration camps; at least, as I have already said, you had little excuse for not knowing, for the facts were constantly being published in books,

pamphlets and Press. But the Germans knew only vaguely and by terrified hearsay. Moreover, there was no danger for you; whereas the slightest action would mean, for a German, the probability of torture and death. Finally, you were a member of a democracy, with all the rights and duties of a citizen; for the Germans civil liberty had utterly vanished.

Does it seem odd that I should put a heavier burden of responsibility on the common people of England than on the common people of Germany? It shouldn't, and for two reasons. The first I have just given: namely, the difference in their situations. The second is that there is no wiser rule of life than to blame ourselves and not others. The mote and the beam.

But a deeper question may still be raised. By accusing the ordinary Englishman I put in its most extreme form the doctrine of political responsibility—of the direct responsibility of every human being for what happens to other human beings throughout the world. I hold passionately to this doctrine, which derives from a belief in the brotherhood of man: since I became a publisher I have tried to live in the light of it: and I could imagine no greater betrayal than to utter a single word which would seem to call this doctrine into question. Why, then, it may be asked, do I apologise for those Germans who made no effort, however hopeless it might have been, to overthrow their vile régime?

It is not too much to say that there can be no final salvation for the world, no firm assurance of light and hope and happiness everywhere, until each single man and woman guides his life by this belief in political responsibility and the brotherhood of man, and until the children of every nation grow up in the climate of it. In other words, there can be no salvation until everywhere there is an active and vital democracy, and until that democracy thinks not merely in national but in international terms. It is our first and immediate duty to achieve that democracy here in Britain: it was the Germans' duty to achieve it in Germany. That is why I said that more Germans *should* have, in some desperate way, gone into active opposition. But there are varying circumstances and conditions in our temporal world, and it is by reference to them that a wise man will measure the gravity of this or that person's failure to measure up to this duty.

Allow me, by way of illustration, to describe a personal experience. In the year 1938 I was speaking in support of China on a village green in the South of England. I described how Chinese babies were being bombed to pieces by the Japanese, and how the materials from which the bombs were made were being in large part supplied by the British Empire; and I said, "Each one of you is responsible." It was, in the final analysis, true: I was right to say it: and if only one of that little audience was moved to become an active citizen by my words some good had been achieved. But when I noticed the looks of amazement and incredulity (I mean, amazement at my accusation of them) on the faces of those small gardeners and agricultural labourers, I reflected

a little. One I happened to know. He was of small intelligence; he hardly ever went even to the neighbouring town; his education had been poor; he read nothing, and had been brought up to read nothing, but the worst of the Sunday papers, and of that only the headlines: he worked long hours at small and mechanical tasks. He *was* responsible for what was happening in China: but who could compare his responsibility with mine, and who would have the hardihood to call him, in a pejorative and not merely a descriptive sense, "guilty"?

By the same token, but by reason of a different set of circumstances, I "apologise" for those Germans who, in the shadow of this awful terror, went about their business.

\* \* \* \* \*

I notice one or two leading articles which seem to recognise, in an uneasy sort of way, the truth of all that has so far been said, but are still unwilling, for psychological reasons, to give up the charge. So they shift their ground once more, and say "However that may be, the *whole German people* brought Hitler to power, and, on that count at least, must share in the guilt of Buchenwald." The whole German people? In the last election before Hitler became Chancellor (November, 1932), only 11,737,000 voted for him out of a total electorate of 44,373,700. And in the election *after* he had become Chancellor (March, 1933), when the terror was already in full swing, out of roughly the same electorate only 17,277,200 voted for the Nazis, and 3,136,800 for the Nationalists with whom they were now allied. Some 5,000,000 abstained, and the remainder, some 19,000,000, voted for anti-Nazi parties—Socialists, Communists, Catholics, etc.

Ignore, then, the appalling unemployment and under-employment of the Germany of 1929 to 1933; ignore the tendency of people in such a situation to vote for anyone who will promise them bread, hope and a job; ignore the absence of a firmly rooted democratic tradition, which was the result of previous history and by no possible argument the responsibility of the present generation; ignore the disastrous split in the progressive forces, a phenomenon, alas, not peculiar to Germany; say that any German who voted for Hitler, for such reasons as these, bears the guilt for Buchenwald: yet it still remains true that even after the establishment of Hitler over forty per cent. of the German electorate voted *against* Hitler and his allies, to say nothing of those who abstained. Forty per cent. of the German electorate cannot, therefore, be held responsible on this count; nor, presumably, can those who were children then or have since been born.

Mussolini was in power for more than twenty years: his vile penal islands were the model for Hitler's camps. Hitler was far wickeder than Mussolini, but Mussolini was wicked enough: why, therefore, using the same argument, do we not hold every Italian responsible for what he did?

I come now to a final question, and one concerned with perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the whole obscenity. "How could it happen that so many men and women were found, not merely to

acquiesce in the régime, but themselves to carry out, on a mass scale, outrages and tortures perhaps more appalling even than those of the Inquisition? Doesn't this show that there's something wrong with the German *blood*?"

It is almost impossible, in face of what these men and women have done, to keep one's head; but it is desirable to do so, and to ask, first of all, how many of them there were. No one knows: but the entire S.S. is supposed at the outbreak of the war to have numbered about 300,000, and the Gestapo machinery was almost certainly smaller. The actual gaolers and torturers were not a large percentage of the S.S. However, there is something shameful, in such a matter, about mathematical calculations: even if there were only *one* who had been found to do what the man of Belsen did, it would be as necessary to find an answer.

The argument about "blood" is frankly nonsensical. If there is something wrong with German "blood" there is something wrong with English "blood," for the two are, in large measure, one and the same: there is something wrong with our Royal Family, whose German "blood" is very recent: there is something wrong with that considerable percentage of the United States armies whose German ancestry is near or remote. To use such an argument is to talk like a Nazi, who says just the same thing about the Jews—or, indeed, in the reverse sense, about himself.

And if somebody replies "Anyhow, who except Germans ever behaved like this?", I tell him that in the German slaughter-camps of Poland many of the gaolers and executioners were Latvians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians: that, according to Miss Myrtle Wright, a Quaker Englishwoman who has just returned after four years in occupied Norway, the Norwegian quisling S.S. men in the Norwegian concentration camps "often outdid their German colleagues in brutality": and that when a concentration camp near Brussels was liberated, a Belgian prisoner told the Foreign Editor of "The Daily Herald" that most of the torturers were Flemish Belgian Fascists. And I ask him what he imagines went on under Codreanu's Iron Guard in Rumania, or indeed under men brutalised by Fascism anywhere?

The horror is to be explained not by nonsensical myths about blood but by the plain facts of environment, conditioning and human psychology. There are potentialities both for good and for evil in every human being: who can look for a moment into his own soul and deny it? And the commonest of all the evils is that lust for power and domination, that desire to impose one's will and personality on others, one expression of which is cruelty. I do not believe, indeed, that any man or woman has ever been born on this earth, save perhaps one, in whom some germ of cruelty was not latent. For most of us, happily, this lust never even comes into consciousness; others suppress it early and easily, or sublimate it, or, by that divine alchemy which is the ultimate ground for hope and faith, convert it immediately and spontaneously into its opposite, which is love. But always it is, or has been, there.

Now what Hitler has done is this. He has taken men and

women, mainly, but not exclusively, the young and undeveloped: he has put them, year after year, through a long course of training: and always he has worked on that little seed of cruelty, has fed it and watered it in the hope that ultimately it would become a monstrous growth and do his evil will. The process is familiar: it has been many times described. First, these boys are set to watch a mild whipping: and if you are surprised that some of them enjoy it, ask yourself why few editors reject a whipping "story" if it is on this side of obscenity or even on the other, and why, too, as the "Daily Express" so proudly boasts, people are flocking to see that great journal's exhibitions of "horror" photographs too terrible even to be printed in the Press. Next, they watch a severer whipping: then they are given the privilege of administering it themselves. The appetite grows by what it feeds on. Perhaps after that they watch an execution: and then a scene of downright diabolical torture. They are now ripe for hell: they become executioners and torturers themselves, and finally the man of Belsen. It is said that civilised men, if they once taste human flesh, become mad. These S.S. men are mad with that kind of madness. God forgive them, and those who made them what they are.

Can you read the various stages of the argument I have tried to set out, and still believe that *all* Germans are "guilty"? Surely it is not possible. What, then, do these writers mean when they say that "The Germans must be made to realise that they are *collectively guilty*"? If they do not mean, as they cannot mean, that *every* German, including those whose ashes we are finding, is in any ordinary sense "guilty," they must mean that there is an entity, namely "the Germans," which is something other than the mere sum total of the German individuals who compose it: that this entity is "guilty": and that, *though* this entity is something other than the mere sum total of the German individuals who compose it, nevertheless, and paradoxically, just because every German "belongs to" it every German, including those whose ashes we are finding, is "guilty."

I believe that this is precisely what these writers do mean. It is a foul conception, and indicates how very rapidly that depersonalisation, which is the greatest of all our modern evils, is proceeding. Stemming from Hegel, this idea of "collective guilt" is a throw-back, as fascism is a throw-back, to pre-Christian barbarism; and that decent and intelligent men should be solemnly discussing it is a measure of our corruption by the thing we have been fighting. What is it that, in the final analysis, makes it utterly impossible for the Judaeo-Christian tradition ever to compromise with fascism? Simply this: that for the one the ultimate reality is the human soul, individual, unique, responsible to God and man, while for the other this ultimate reality is some abstraction—a State, Folk or Collective which men have created out of nothing, and which has no existence except in their own vain imagination. For primitive men to think in terms of the collective

was natural ; for the fascists it is artificial ; that is the only difference between them. So far as Western civilisation, or what was to be Western civilisation, is concerned, the first great protest against the old blasphemy was made in the legend of Abraham pleading with the Lord to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah :

“ And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous ;

I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me ; and if not, I will know.

And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom : but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked ?

Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city : wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein ?

That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked : and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee ; Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?

And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes :

Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous : wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five ? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.

And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And He said, I will not do it for forty's sake.

And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak : Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And He said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

And he said, Behold I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord : Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.

And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once : Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham ; and Abraham returned unto his place.”

Later, the prophet Ezekiel was to carry this wisdom a stage further, and, deserting fable, to make his passionate appeal to reason and justice :

“ Now, 'lo, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like,

That hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife,

Neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge,

neither hath spoiled by violence, but hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment,

That hath taken off his hand from the poor, that hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.

As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity.

Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

And finally Jesus of Nazareth, substituting for justice the love that includes it, put in its simplest and highest form the doctrine of individual personality without which there can be no salvation:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

This Judaeo-Christian tradition is our inner citadel. We have been fighting to preserve it for our children: are we now to surrender it in the very moment of victory?

I will leave it at that. I can only hope that the reader will at least give honour where honour is due, and, when mourning for the Russians and Jews and slave-labourers from many lands who have met their end in Dachau and Buchenwald, will find it in his heart to say, as I say, "Salute also to these German heroes of Dachau and Buchenwald: to these Christians, Jews, Communists, Socialists, Liberals, Pacifists and ordinary men and women, against whom Hitler employed all his malice, but could not prevail." For God sees them, I dare to think, as History will see them, sleeping side by side with the slain of our own nation in a common martyrs' grave: nor will they be grudged their place, for all will know, in the region where truth and generosity prevail, that, awful as were the sufferings of the British and Russians and Americans and all the other nations in the armies of liberation, some of these outcast Germans suffered more and suffered longer.

*Brimpton, April 24th, 1945.*